



Penrith Town Council

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CONSULTATION POLICY

PURPOSE

There are seven key objectives:

1. To maximise stakeholder engagement.
2. To develop the Council's services to meet the range of needs of our different customers.
3. To co-ordinate consultation across Penrith.
4. To develop the Council's ability to make effective use of consultation techniques.
5. To maximise equality of consultation.
6. To enhance the Council's communication.
7. To meet legislative Requirements.

The overall purpose is to improve the services and operations of the Council by understanding the needs of the community and others who are affected by its decisions.

The primary responsibility and means for consultation is through the role played by the Members of the Council. As democratically elected representatives they are duty-bound to represent the views of their constituents.

Throughout their term of office, Members will make themselves available to be contacted by residents of their ward without partiality. This role extends to the development of an effective relationship with the elected ward representatives from both the district and county councils. The Council will strive to ensure that wherever possible ward councillors from all levels of local government are kept informed and not surprised by new or emerging ward matters.

In support of this approach section 24 of the Council's Standing Orders require that:

- an invitation to attend a meeting of the Council together with the agenda and draft minutes to the ward councillor(s) of the district and county council.
- a copy of each letter sent to the District and County Council shall be sent to the ward councillor(s) representing the area of the Council.

In addition to the role played by individual Members, the Council has arrangements in place for public speaking at meetings. Members of the public may attend Full Council and committee meetings (except for confidential items), where they can submit questions

WHY WE CONSULT

Penrith Town Council appreciates the importance of public participation to inform policy and decision making. Whilst Members are elected to represent the views of the people through their daily contact with constituents, Members cannot be aware of the views of all the people they represent on every issue. It is therefore essential for the Council to undertake additional forms of consultation.

To encourage public participation, we wish to make information about our services and how we work freely accessible.

Consultation can enable us to:

- Target our services effectively
- Improve awareness and use of our services
- Monitor user satisfaction
- Help make decisions about policies, priorities and strategies
- Represent the views of Penrith's residents
- Improve our stock of local knowledge

WHEN WE WILL CONSULT

We recognise that consultation is not always appropriate, e.g. where the Council is limited by statutory or budgetary restrictions. It is also important to avoid "consultation fatigue". Therefore, consultation will only be used (a) where it is possible to influence decision-making or (b) when we need to identify user satisfaction or add to our stock of knowledge.

Priority areas for consultation include:

- Major policy decisions where not much is known about people's views
- Controversial decisions where there is likely to be a high level of public interest
- Services that account for a significant proportion of overall spending
- New services
- Services with low user satisfaction

Increasingly, services are delivered to local people through a partnership of different agencies. Where this is the case, seeking the views of partner organisations is as important as seeking the views of residents.

The Council will continue to consult partners such as other statutory agencies, the voluntary sector and private businesses in the development of any matters, projects, policies and services that affect them.

The Council will consider the benefits of consulting with voluntary and community groups as representatives of individual sectors of the public, especially where they are able to effectively speak on behalf of people who might otherwise find it difficult to engage in the democratic process.

Within the overall mix of consultation approaches that is adopted, the Council will balance the proportion that is undertaken with partner organisations and community groups, compared with that which is conducted directly with individual members of the public.

CORE STANDARDS

The Council will apply Principles of Good Consultation

Focus and Clarity

Being *unclear* is likely to be a key reason for tension between the town council and the community. Therefore, the Town Council will:

- be clear on why the consultation is taking place
- have a consultation plan or purpose

Inclusiveness, accessibility and diversity

We will:

- clarify who stakeholders are and which are difficult to access
- develop effective working relationships with stakeholders
- ensure our levels of engagement, e.g. inform, consult involve, collaborate and empower are suited to different contexts and participants
- our consultation methods are suitable for all participants, including hard to reach groups and individuals

Provision of information

We will:

- make sure all information provided is meaningful and understandable
- ensure there is enough information for those being consulted to make an informed opinion

Timing

We will:

- consider when in the process consultation should take place, for example:
 - is it early enough to help identify the issues or merely seeking comment on already identified issues
 - is it early enough for people to feel the council is genuinely interested in their opinions
 - is the decision-making process clear, well communicated and transparent?

Implementation of the Final Decision

Tensions can be caused by lack of clarity around the implementation of outcomes of council decisions. The Town Council will consider how all outcomes will be implemented. To add credibility to our consultation process, our record management system will log decisions and track implementation of the outcome through to completion

The Council will employ a 6-step approach to consultation planning

1. Gather and record information
2. Define community engagement objectives -
3. Establish community engagement parameters (including what is negotiable and what is not)
4. Identify key issues/interests and responses
5. Select suitable methods/techniques for each consultation and context
6. Evaluate continuously and prepare to alter the consultation plan if necessary

The Council will comply with Data Protection

Penrith Town Council supports the objectives of UK Data Protection Law, General Data Protection Regulations and encourages all employees to observe its principles, to reinforce the principles of confidentiality, which will always apply in the Council's activities. Where members of the community have been told that all data will be held in confidence:

- All research will be kept anonymous, to be accessed by the research/project team only. Where appropriate, the identity of people will be kept confidential and, if necessary, pseudonyms will be used. However, in many cases, confidentiality will not be an issue, e.g. a statutory consultation
- Presentations and publications will be fully anonymous
- Confidentiality will be guaranteed to all participants in all circumstances, save disclosures of serious harm/danger/distress to the subject, or a third party.

Members of the Council will:

- Make themselves available to hear the views of their constituents.
- Respond to constituents' enquiries and representations fairly.
- Actively encourage citizen participation in decision-making.
- Balance the range of different interests and represent their ward as a whole without partiality.
- Develop an effective relationship with member colleagues from other local authorities, to ensure that all parties are informed and that there are no surprises.

The Council will:

- Ensure that our district and county councillor and officer colleagues are both informed and consulted on matters that might impact on their representative wards.
- Involve user/interest groups.
- Only undertake consultation where it is possible to influence decision making.
- The Council will consult as early as possible in the decision-making process to allow views to be taken into consideration.
- Only undertake consultation when we need to identify user satisfaction.
- Only undertake consultation to add to our stock of local knowledge.
- Be clear about what we are asking the public to comment on.
- Give sufficient time for people to respond and be clear about the timeframes.
- Listen to and respect all opinions received.
- Give consideration as to how the views of people who do not normally participate can be obtained.
- Use plain language in all documents and presentations.
- Give a named contact person for returns and further information, the Community Engagement Officer who will validate all public consultation projects before implementation, provide and deliver the relevant consultation strategy, give feedback to those consulted on the outcome and explain why decisions were taken.

The Council will manage expectations and outcomes

Whilst consultation should have a strong influence on decisions, it should not dictate them. The results of consultation will be considered alongside other factors, such as available resources. When consulting, we will make clear what the purpose of the consultation is and what options are available to local people, to prevent unreasonably raising the public's expectations.

The Council will provide feedback and evaluate the process

We are committed to providing feedback on the results to those we consult and explain how these results have been considered. Evaluating the effectiveness of consultation can help us to:

- Know whether consultation is genuinely helping us to listen and respond to the public
- Plan how to improve consultation
- Use consultation resources wisely
- Know whether a consultation reached a representative sample of the population

The Council will develop appropriate documentation

- We will develop a generic list of documents that need to be set up and maintained during all consultation processes, and we will add additional documents as required for specific consultations.
- We will set up and maintain a record of documents used and produced throughout the consultation process, including the following:
 - Relevant Council Reports
 - Briefing papers
 - Project briefs and proposals
 - Project meeting notes
 - Media releases
 - Communication
 - Action Plan/Task Breakdown
 - Survey feedback report and any responses
 - Project plans
 - Community feedback and outcome reports

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